

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: STATE AND LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

GENERAL

The Old Spanish Trail was also considered with respect to several themes for which it is determined to be of a local or state level of significance but not of national significance. In some cases, the determination is that the travel is part of a longer route that overlaps part of the Old Spanish Trail, and it is not appropriate to ascribe the significance of the particular travel to the Old Spanish Trail.

Throughout the early history of the United States, many people from diverse backgrounds traveled over a wide network of trails. Virtually all of them were engaging in activities that, taken as a whole, had an impact on the development of our nation's history and culture. It should not be concluded, based on the following discussions, that when the travel of particular groups is determined not to be nationally significant this indicates that the travel was not at some level important, or that the achievements of travelers are to be considered insignificant. Indeed, anyone who traveled long distances across the West in historic times should be given considerable credit for their courage, daring, and tenacity. However, the goal of a national trail study is to determine those routes that were not only part of the important events in America's history, but that, by themselves, had broad impacts on that history. Some trails may meet the criteria for national significance within one theme, while a lesser number might be significant with respect to more than one theme. Many historic trail routes are meritorious, and would be significant at the local and state levels. A few trails would be considered outstanding, and thus would meet the criteria for designation as National Historic Trails.

Events happening along the Old Spanish Trail as a whole, but more frequently only along sections of the trail, played a role in many of the broader national themes being played out across the West, including exploration, immigration, commerce, impacts upon and relations with American Indians, the fur trade, and more. However, when examined in detail, the events along the Old Spanish Trail can be seen as parts of larger themes developing across the West in which the trail did not play a critical role. The trail would have a local or state level of significance with respect to these themes, but would not be considered to have an association of the "highest importance," or to have had "far reaching effects on broad patterns of American culture," as called for in the National Historic Landmark criteria and the National Trails System Act. Aside from the people who used the entire trail between New Mexico and California, other users of the Old Spanish Trail, such as later military surveyors or Mormons on the western segment, were engaged in trips that only took them along sections of the trail, as part of longer journeys. Many of these journeys may be historic trails in their own right, and the insignificance should be ascribed to the entire length of the particular journey, not to the Old Spanish Trail.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration to California on the Old Spanish Trail by New Mexicans, United States citizens, and others must be analyzed in the context of the population in the region, and the total movement of people to the area along the Old Spanish Trail in comparison to other routes people used to move to California.

Population estimates of non-Indians in California between 1821 and the Gold Rush vary. While specific numbers may not be completely accurate, the overall trends are consistent. Sánchez (1999:15) gives the following estimates:

... in the late Spanish period the population [of California] was barely creeping over 3,000 people Throughout the 1840s the population of California fluctuated probably reaching around 10,000, 12,000,

15,000 maybe 25,000 by the early days of the Gold Rush. But by 1852, with the gold rush, the population of California swelled to over 225,000 inhabitants.

During the same period, New Mexico had an estimated population of 45,000 in 1821, and 65,000 in 1846, showing only a 2.1 percent growth rate compared to 5 percent for California and 1.1 percent for Mexico as a whole (Weber 1982:195, 206).

Weber (1982:206) gives an estimate for the Hispanic population of California of 3,320 in 1821 and 7,300 in 1845, which is similar to the 7,000 cited by Dr. John Marsh in an 1845 letter (Shinn 1890:532). A rather high figure for the population of *Alta California* in 1836 of 29,000, with a population for Monterey of 2,500, is found in the *Diario Oficial* (Estados Unidos de Mexico 1836:180) in Mexico City. The *Diario Oficial* also gives figures for *Baja California* of 20,000 and New Mexico of 150,000, with a population in Santa Fe of 5,000 (ibid.). Faxon D. Atherton gives an 1838 estimate of the California population as “probably about 4,000 white inhabitants, mostly descendants of Spanish soldiers [and] about 500 foreigners, 2/3 of which a[re] hunters and sum[m]ary sailors” (Hollis 1999, quoting from the Atherton manuscript collection).

“The foreign male population not of Spanish blood has been given as 150 in 1830, 300 in 1835, 380 in 1840, and 680 in 1845” (Bancroft 1886b:524). Dr. John Marsh, in an 1845 letter, estimates that there were about 900 foreigners in California, of whom about 700 were American (Shinn 1890:531-532). About 1848, the non-Hispanic/non-Indian population of California was around 4,200 (Bancroft 1886b:524).

Spain and Mexico were not successful in encouraging colonists to move north to California, leading to a policy of sending convicts north as settlers (Weber 1982:188). Convicts were sent to Santa Cruz and San Jose, California, in 1795. Some convict colonists arrived in 1825, and in 1829 a more systematic program was initiated. About 150 convicts came to California in 1829-1830, leading to protests from the citizens of California. In 1842, an additional 150 convicts and their women reached California (Weber 1982:189).

Another group of settlers, primarily from the Mexico City area, came to California in 1834. A total of 239 colonists were recruited to establish a settlement in northern California as a check against the Russian settlement at Fort Ross. These settlers included many with professions and trades, such as teacher, lawyer, doctor, carpenter, and shoemaker. They arrived in California by ship. The establishment of the colony failed due to political disputes, but most of the colonists stayed in California (Weber 1982:185-186).

Immigration by Hispanic New Mexicans along the Old Spanish Trail was relatively limited, although it would appear that there was little, if any, New Mexican immigration that did not use the Old Spanish Trail. New Mexican immigration began in the late 1830s, with the largest groups in the 1840s, which led to the establishment of the communities of Agua Mansa and La Placita (Harley 1998:34). Based on known groups and individuals, it would appear that perhaps 200 to 400 New Mexicans are known to have moved to California during the late 1830s and early 1840s. It is difficult to estimate the totals because the record often only lists number of families and not number of individuals. Further research may help clarify the actual numbers of immigrants from New Mexico.

The communities of Agua Mansa and La Placita did serve as a buffer against incursions by Indian groups, and participated in punitive expeditions against such raiders. They also participated in at least one battle against American forces during the Mexican-American War. Such activities, while commendable within the historic context of the period, do not appear to demonstrate a “far reaching effect” or an “association of the highest importance” with nationally significant events. Based on known

information, these communities would probably be considered of state-level significance. Similarly, the arrival of a group of 100 or 150 people in the Los Angeles area would certainly be important and locally significant, and, given the population of California overall, might be of significance at the state level, but there is no indication that this had an impact at the national level for either Mexico or the United States.

Non-Hispanic immigration to California from the 1820s into the 1850s came from a variety of sources, including the Old Spanish Trail. Beginning in the 1820s, fur trappers were making their way into California through a number of routes across Arizona. The various routes through Arizona are sometimes collectively referred to as the “Gila Route.” From 1828 to 1832, a number of the trappers (approximately 16 or more based on counting names documented by Weber and others) stayed in California (Weber 1971). Dr. John Marsh, who is often mentioned as traveling the Old Spanish Trail to California, actually went by means of a roundabout route to Chihuahua and eventually along the Gila (Warren 1974:111-112). The majority of non-Hispanic immigrants to California prior to the 1840s arrived by sea (Billington and Ridge 1982:503). Beginning in the 1820s, Americans and others left (legitimately, or by jumping ship) ocean-going trading ships to become residents of California. Immigration by land increased in the 1840s; immigration by sea did not stop. For example, Bancroft (1886:525) estimates that about 230 immigrants came to California by sea in 1846.

Weber (1971:153) suggests that other American trappers may have gone to California by way of New Mexico. He cites one example in which a group of Tennessee trappers were in Monterey in 1836. There is no evidence of the route followed by such groups or how many, if any, stayed in California. In 1833, a group of 40 men led by Joseph Walker traveled across northern Utah and northern Nevada, and probably entered California somewhere near Mono Pass. In 1834, the group left California, but six chose to stay to “exchange the life of a trapper for that of a ranchero or mechanic ...” (Goetzmann 1966:154).

In 1841, the same year as the Rowland-Workman party, the Bidwell-Bartleson party of about 30 became the first immigrants on the route that became known as the California Trail. The California Trail brought the Hastings’ party of 40 in 1843, followed by another large group the same year; and in 1845, about 250 immigrants came to California by the northern routes (Billington and Ridge 1982:505). Unruh (1993:119) estimates a total overland immigration to California at 2,735 between 1841 and 1848. With the Gold Rush beginning in 1849, over 200,000 people immigrated to California primarily along the California Trail and its variants (Unruh 1993:120). Some followed the Mormon Road from Salt Lake City to southern California, and thus also followed the western end of the Old Spanish Trail. Use of this route became popular for travelers who arrived from the East too late in the season to be able to cross the Sierra Nevada by the more direct California Trail.

A look at non-Mexican immigration shows that the influx of foreigners into California by land on all routes, up until the Mexican-American War, was outweighed by immigration by sea. Before the 1840s, the total immigration on the Old Spanish Trail by Americans was slightly higher than immigration along the Gila Route. In 1842, American immigration on the Old Spanish Trail and the California Trail was about equal; after that time, non-Hispanic immigration on the Old Spanish Trail was small, while such immigration increased gradually, primarily along the California Trail, until the Gold Rush resulted in a massive increase in the population of California.

Overall, non-Mexican immigration to California along the Old Spanish Trail was one part of a diverse pattern of immigration using many routes in the 1820s through the 1840s. It was never the dominant route of immigration, and would therefore qualify as being of state significance but not of national significance within this context.

The movement of people and settlement on the Old Spanish Trail and the impact of this movement were a small part of the whole. By itself, this movement was associated with historical events; however, it does not qualify as nationally significant, because the "specific association" was not, by itself, when compared with all other routes of immigration, of the "highest importance," which is called for in the National Landmark criterion. It would qualify as having state-level significance.

THE AMERICAN CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA

Some historical accounts (Sánchez 1999, for example) suggest that the American immigrants going to California on the Old Spanish Trail played an important role, especially prior to 1840, in the American "fifth column" (Weber 1971:152), which helped promote the American takeover of California. Mexican officials in California and Texas were voicing the same sentiment in the 1830s and 1840s. However, while Americans traveling the Old Spanish Trail did join this "fifth column," so did those who entered California by means of the Gila and other routes. The hundreds who arrived by sea significantly outnumbered those who arrived by land.

While some of those who immigrated to California on the Old Spanish Trail played leadership roles in the American community, such as John Rowland and William Workman (Hafen and Hafen 1982:216-219), so did many more who arrived by other routes, such as John Marsh, Thomas Larkin, John Sutter, and Abel Stearns, all of whom were major figures among the Americans and other foreigners in California (Billington and Ridge 1982:500).

The activities of Old Spanish Trail travelers in California do not seem to derive directly from their travel on the Old Spanish Trail as much as they did from their later economic, social, and political activities in California and a general support of American expansion. This would hold true for many other foreigners who arrived by other routes, such as those coming through Arizona. Landownership and other business interests provided incentives for increasing political and economic power. What was happening in California can be compared to similar activities in New Mexico, in which some traders initially moved to New Mexico in order to continue their Santa Fe Trail trade activities. Their economic incentive for an American takeover in New Mexico was more directly tied to their Santa Fe Trail trade activities. The close tie between the American takeover of Mexico and the Santa Fe trade was expressed by Senator Thomas Hart Benton with regard to the Mexican-American War: "Our first care in this sudden change in our relations with that country [Mexico] was to try and take care of our Santa Fe trade. For this purpose it will be proposed to the people of New Mexico, Chihuahua, and other internal provinces, that they remain quiet and continue trading with us as usual, upon which conditions they shall be protected in all their rights and treated as friends" (Lamar 1966:57). It does not appear that the continuation of trade and travel on the Old Spanish Trail was a similar concern in the activities of the foreigners in California, although continued involvement in the tallow and hide trade, land speculation, and landownership were incentives. This sentiment is illustrated by a saying among American merchants in California who converted to Catholicism for the sake of trade, "A man must leave his conscience at Cape Horn" (White 1991:50).

Travelers in the American underground who used the Old Spanish Trail to get to California were a small part of a much larger group who arrived along numerous routes and who were involved in similar activities. Their activities were tied more directly to political and economic interests in California, and there is little tie between these later activities and their use of the Old Spanish Trail. Some were important participants, but they were neither the most important nor the most numerous.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN TOWNS

It has been suggested that the development of towns such as San Bernardino, Las Vegas, Cedar City, Moab, Durango, and others on the Old Spanish Trail was significant (Gough 1999). Gough suggests that in the arid West, towns that developed along trails tend to thrive while those not along these routes do not. This process can be compared with the relationship of waterways to the development of towns in the East. Some towns and cities along the Old Spanish Trail predate the trail era. For example, Santa Fe was settled in 1610 and was not then directly along a major trail, and Los Angeles was settled by sea in 1769. Overall, this idea may have some merit with regard to many western trails.

The development of such trail-related towns ties to many factors, including available resources, water, and other factors, such as railroads. Cedar City, for example, was founded as part of the Mormon Church's Iron Mission largely because of the resources available in the area, and was not directly a result of the Old Spanish Trail traffic between New Mexico and California. The town of Durango was plotted out as a railroad town in 1880. Moab was first settled by a group of Mormons in 1855; they were forced to leave, and settlers did not return until 22 years later. The Spanish established several missions in the San Bernardino valley. Hispanic settlement in the San Bernardino valley was encouraged as a "shield against unwanted intruders passing over the Cajon Pass on the Old Spanish Trail" (Gough 1999:23) and settlers from New Mexico, who traveled the Old Spanish Trail, established communities in the area. Mormons established a colony at San Bernardino in the early 1850s.

While the overall settlement of the West by Euro-Americans might be considered nationally significant, the development of towns such as San Bernardino, Las Vegas, Moab, Cedar City, Durango, and others along the Old Spanish Trail would not be deemed to have a "far reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture," as is required by the National Trails System Act, or to be of the "highest importance," or "outstandingly represent" these events. These towns are fairly typical western towns compared to others of similar size, although in recent years, many have been thriving because of recreational, economic, lifestyle, and other contemporary reasons. They would qualify as being of local, or in some cases of state, significance.

MILITARY EXPEDITIONS AND TRAVEL

The Old Spanish Trail was used by a number of military groups and groups with military associations. Most of this travel involved the use of sections of the trail of varying lengths as parts of longer trips. Evaluation of the significance of these various and unrelated trips requires a comparison with the significance of similar military travel during the same time period. Most of these expeditions used only part of the Old Spanish Trail. There are two issues to consider: One is determining the significance of a particular trip; the second is whether the significance of that expedition is to be ascribed to the Old Spanish Trail or to the entire route of the trip being considered.

In evaluating the military expeditions on the Old Spanish Trail, it is important to note that there were many military expeditions across the West that did not involve the Old Spanish Trail, which are well documented by Goetzmann (1966 and 1959). Other railroad survey expeditions in 1853 include Parke (1853) and Pope (1853), both along the 32nd parallel; and Stevens and McClelland, both along 47th and 49th parallels. Expeditions around the time of the Mexican-American War include Frémont (1845); Abert (1845); Emory-Kearny (1846); and Cooke (1846). Later expeditions include Stansbury (1849); Sitgreaves (1851); Marcy-Simpson (1849); Warren (1855, 1856, 1857); Raynolds (1859-1860); and

Parke (1859-1860). A complete analysis of the significance of the expeditions that used parts of the Old Spanish Trail would require a theme analysis and comparison with these other similar expeditions.

A number of “Mormon War” expeditions were sent out to find routes into Utah in anticipation of the need to supply manpower for the U.S. Army troops that were part of Albert Sidney Johnston’s Army of Utah, including Macomb’s trip (Goetzmann 1966:306). Johnston’s troops were sent to Utah in anticipation of a Mormon revolt. According to Goetzmann (1966:306), the 1858 expedition led by Lieutenant Joseph Christmas Ives was one of the most important of these expeditions, leading to the first Euro-American explorations of the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Dr. Newberry, who had been with Macomb, was also the geologist on this expedition. A major accomplishment of Macomb’s expedition was scientific observations by geologist John S. Newberry. Goetzmann suggests that Macomb’s expedition was almost equal in importance to that of Ives. Another “Mormon War” expedition was the Great Basin exploration led by Captain James Hervey Simpson, which allowed geologist Henry Engelmann “an opportunity to make a complete transcontinental profile from the Mississippi to the Pacific (Goetzmann 1966:309).

Goetzmann (1959:103) says that Frémont’s most important influence was not on government officials but on the public. His report helped fuel the urge for westward expansion, and his report and maps were used by some immigrants as guides in their westward trek (Goetzmann 1979:93). Frémont’s glowing report of the Great Salt Lake area inspired Brigham Young to bring the Mormons there to settle (Goetzmann 1979:92). There are reports that some caravan commanders on the Old Spanish Trail carried copies of Frémont’s report as a guidebook (Wylly 1978). However, it is doubtful that his short journey along a segment of the Old Spanish Trail was the most important part of his trip, as compared to the segment along the Oregon Trail. In 1846, a map based on Frémont’s data was published showing the Oregon Trail in great detail, and this map was widely used by western travelers (Goetzmann 1959:105-106). His report did induce some travelers to follow in his footsteps on the variant route along the Amargosa River across part of the Mojave Desert (Warren 1974:180), and many immigrants following the road from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles did take copies of his writings along.

A full analysis of the significance of Frémont’s entire journey and his other explorations is beyond the scope of this study. There is no doubt that he was individually a significant historical figure, and that his explorations were significant in American history. Goetzmann (1966:240) suggests that Frémont’s explorations between 1842 and 1845 may even surpass the importance of the Lewis and Clark expedition in “the calculated use of exploring expeditions as diplomatic weapons.” However, it is the *entire route* of Frémont’s expedition to which significance should be ascribed, and not the entire Old Spanish Trail from New Mexico to California, when only parts of that trail were actually used by Frémont.

Gunnison’s trip has been described as “the worst disaster suffered by the Army in the West up to that time, and the publicity it received was a severe blow to advocates of a central railroad route ... ” (Goetzmann 1966:287). First Lieutenant Edward G. Beckwith, who wrote the report of the Gunnison expedition, became the leader of the remainder of the expedition after Gunnison’s death. Beckwith explored the Wasatch, and then, with the addition of survivors of Frémont’s “second disaster,” he took the group west from Salt Lake City along the 41st parallel anticipating “the actual route taken by the first transcontinental railroad.” However, he did not put cost estimates in his final report, and it was “virtually ignored” in the final evaluation of the railroad surveys (Goetzmann 1966:288).

According to Goetzmann (1959:295-304), the railroad exploration expeditions did not have their desired effect of providing a conclusion regarding the best route for a railroad—although the 38th parallel route was eliminated early as a result of Gunnison’s survey. Overall, Goetzmann maintains, the route selection was illogical, and the information collected was sometimes inaccurate, and of dubious value in

making a selection. Politics and regional boosterism continued as the surveys were evaluated. In the end, the controversy over which was the best route continued. Ultimately, the Central Pacific Railroad, building eastward from California, and the Union Pacific Railroad, moving westward across Nebraska and Wyoming, completed their own surveys to determine the final route prior to their historic meeting at Promontory Point in Utah.

There were numerous expeditions primarily led by the U.S. Army's Corps of Topographic Engineers. They included a variety of scientists, including geologists, zoologists, and botanists. They brought back considerable information about the West. A complete evaluation of the significance of all these expeditions and other military travel is beyond the scope of this study. It would require a large theme study, done within the guidelines of the National Register program, in which a comparative study would be conducted to determine the relative significance of the individual trips.

The carrying of dispatches, such as was done by Kit Carson along the Old Spanish Trail, was a routine military activity. Indeed, the trip was not hurried, and upon arriving in Taos, Carson spent a few days with his family before continuing on (Hafen and Hafen 1982:337). In 1846, he carried dispatches from California east along the Gila Route in Arizona, and he followed the same route again in early 1847 (Hafen and Hafen 1982:314). Other mountain men engaged in similar activity. Jim Beckwourth, for example, carried dispatches for the military between Santa Fe and Fort Leavenworth along the Santa Fe Trail (Wilson 1972:109-112). Trips such as Colonel Loring's were, in the context of the day, also relatively routine travel for military units. Having finished their assignment in Utah, they were simply traveling to Fort Union, as ordered.

Carleton's campaign against the Paiute was not unlike numerous other military campaigns against various American Indian tribes. Tragically, these campaigns were all too common. Overall, "there was little long-term effect" of Carleton's campaign (Chenoweth 1999:30-31). Carleton's campaign can be compared to the 1849 expedition under Colonel John M. Washington as a punitive expedition against the Navajo who were raiding outlying New Mexican settlements, which had much more devastating consequences. The troops invaded the stronghold of the Navajo at Canyon de Chelly, and soundly defeated the Indians (Goetzmann 1966:275). Carleton's efforts can also be compared to the 1864 expedition against the Navajo led by Kit Carson, during which the tribe's crops were burned, their livestock killed, and they were rounded up and forcibly removed and held in captivity in eastern New Mexico after the infamous Long Walk (Trafzer 1982).

It would not appear warranted to ascribe national significance to the entire Old Spanish Trail from New Mexico to California on the basis of the military use of the trail. There would seem to be no compelling reason to ascribe to the entire Old Spanish Trail from New Mexico to California the broad significance of military travel in the West, or the significance of an entire single expedition when it only used parts of the Old Spanish Trail as a part of longer trips. The trail was not a strategic military route. The significance of a particular expedition route belongs to the entire route actually used by that expedition, not to the entirety of each trail the expedition may have used to a limited degree.

SIGNIFICANT PERSONS

In evaluating the Old Spanish Trail under National Historic Landmark Criterion 2, it is appropriate to look at the two best known travelers on the Old Spanish Trail: John C. Frémont and Kit Carson.

The significance of Frémont's explorations is discussed briefly above, and although a complete study of his life and expeditions would be required, it is likely that he was "exceptionally significant within" the context of military expeditions of the West. He rose to prominence based on his travels, and was

popularly known as “The Pathfinder.” His travels had significant impact on public views of the West, and thereby helped spur westward expansion. Claims relating to his expeditions’ scientific and geographic accomplishments may not have been as significant (Goetzmann 1979:101-108). Frémont later became a candidate for the Presidency, although he lost.

As mentioned, a more detailed study of Frémont’s significance and conclusions related to it is beyond the scope of this study. His 1843-1844 expedition might be considered the route that best represents his historic contributions. However, as noted above, the significance of that trip should be ascribed to the entire journey and not to the entire Old Spanish Trail from New Mexico to California. The period of significance for this expedition would be limited to 1843-1844.

In his life, Kit Carson traveled many western trails. He became one of the best known of the mountain men, and came to New Mexico on the Santa Fe Trail in 1826. He traveled to California with Ewing Young through Arizona in 1829-1830; accompanied Frémont in 1843-1844, which included travel on parts of the Old Spanish Trail, and traveled into the country of the Yellowstone, Bighorn, Missouri, and Big Snake rivers; and much more. As mentioned, he carried military dispatches on the Old Spanish Trail and through Arizona on the Gila Route during the Mexican-American War. He joined the army during the Civil War and fought at the battle of Valverde (Vestal 1928). In 1863, Carson led the campaign against the Navajo, which ultimately led to the removal of the Navajo on the Long Walk (Trafzer 1982).

Carson achieved national prominence for the totality of his many roles in the West as a trapper, guide, soldier, and more. Kit Carson may be considered a nationally significant individual (his house in Taos is a National Historic Landmark), but this does not mean that all the trails he followed qualify as National Historic Trails. Nor does it mean that any particular trail he followed ought to be a National Historic Trail. A full study of Carson’s travels would be required and a determination made as to whether his use of any particular trail(s) led to “far reaching impacts on broad patterns of American culture,” as is required in the National Trails System Act, followed by a determination as to which trail, if any, best exemplified this.

A cursory analysis would suggest, for example, that Carson’s harsh campaign against the Navajo was more significant than his trips on the Old Spanish Trail. This campaign led to the removal of the Navajo from their homelands on the Long Walk. In 1868, after originally proposing to move the Navajo to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma, the U.S. Government signed a treaty allowing them to return to their homelands. This was an unusual reversal of normal federal Indian policy of the time.

GENERIC TRAIL

It has been suggested that the Old Spanish Trail is nationally significant because of the variety of uses that occurred along it, or pieces of it. Many western trails witnessed a multitude of uses. The National Historic Landmark criteria focus on determining national significance, occurring in a defined period of time, within a prescribed historical theme. While a historic site, or trail, could be significant under more than one theme, historic events that do not fit within the particular theme being evaluated do not contribute to significance under that theme. As mentioned earlier, some individual uses and related trail resources would appear to meet National Register of Historic Places criteria for state-level significance.



Blue Diamond Spring, Nevada

Figure 3